

THE
EROTICS OF
DOMINATION
Male Desire

and the Mistress

in Latin Love Poetry

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To Jim

is, very often, no happy matter (*felix materia*) for women. Furthermore, Ovid's portrayal of amatory relations displays both men and women caught in the mechanisms of power and domination, mechanisms that, to be sure, privilege the male but may indeed provoke us to wonder if men, as well as women, are prisoners of gender in the game of love.

CHAPTER FIVE

Sexual Politics in Ovid's *Amores*



IN CHAPTER 4 we saw how the poems in Book 1 of the *Amores* expose the destructive aspects of *amor* by revealing a pattern of gender relations which revolves around the portrayal of the elegiac mistress as a commodified object. In this chapter we shall expand our investigation of Ovid's critique of *amor* by examining poems in Books 2 and 3. I will argue that the *amator's* blatant deception and exploitation of women demonstrate how the version of *amor* practiced by the *amator* is woven inextricably with an ideology of male domination and power which reflects Roman mercantilist and imperialist attitudes. Indeed, Ovid's arrangement of the poems in the *Amores* shows his narrator's increasing pessimism about amatory relations. The *amator* seems, at first, to adopt the conventional role of the elegiac lover and gradually reveals that his persona as a *servus amoris* is a posture "we are invited to penetrate."¹ But the later poems in the collection paint a more blatant picture of the *amator's* use of deception to get what he wants and an increasing indifference to the moral implications of his amatory attitudes and practices. Unlike his poetic predecessors, for Ovid the world of *amor* and the world of the marketplace are, by no means, so different from one another.² In earlier poems in the *Amores*, Ovid shows how deception is an effective strategy for attaining the *amator's* desires. But in a number of the poems in the second and third books—particularly those that show open adultery in which women are treated as commodities of exchange between their husbands and

their lovers—Ovid presents a view of Roman society which sanctions exploitation and brutality toward women.

The flagrant indifference of the *amator* to the moral implications of his amatory practices conveys Ovid's attempt to destroy the myth of the elegiac lover as the upholder of an ideal that is morally superior to the conventional values of Roman society. As Julie Hemker observes, in Ovid's version of the rape of the Sabine women in the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid calls into question the legitimacy of the men's actions by focusing sympathetically on the helplessness of the women and the horror of their situation.³ Hemker also observes that in the early books of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid relates the inner terror of sexually abused virgins. Ovid's sympathetic portrayal of women who are victimized by predatory males in the *Metamorphoses* can be linked to a somewhat unsympathetic portrayal of the lover in the *Amores*, a lover whose selfish attempts to gratify his own desires, no matter what the cost to his victims, may also be regarded as predatory and exploitative. In the *Amores*, however, Ovid does not explore the responses of the *amator's* female victims. Instead, Ovid offers only the *amator's* perspective, which, as Mary-Kay Gamel has argued, "is conspicuously marked as male."⁴ The blasé, facile way the *amator* manipulates, deceives, and uses others for his own erotic advantage forces us to see, if not condemn, the uglier, less idealized, less romanticized side of amatory experience. Superficially, the *Amores* seems to endorse "duplicity as a way of love,"⁵ but on a deeper level I believe Ovid is criticizing not only the hypocrisy of the whole elegiac model with its attendant romantic illusions, but more importantly, the cruel, destructive, and inhumane aspects of *amor*.

In this chapter I shall argue that Ovid extends his critique of violence and exploitation of women to a more general critique of a social and political system that promotes aggression, conquest, and the exploitation of others. My discussion will focus on poems in the second and third books which show most clearly not only the *amator's* unabashedly deceitful manner but also how Ovid attempts to expose and ridicule the hypocrisy that is inherent in the elegiac ideal—an ideal based on the illusion of *fides*. Further, I will show, particularly in poems in the third book, that Ovid exposes not only the cynical mercantilism in his narrator's amatory attitudes and practices but also how the hegemonic discourse of the *amator* is connected with the colonizing and patriarchal value system that had existed in Rome for centuries.

Indeed, Ovid's use of military metaphors to describe amatory experience takes on greater force in the second and third books. The *amator's* increasingly explicit identification with masculine aggression and military conquest as his mode of conduct and discourse in amatory affairs points up essential linkages

between the Roman public world and private consciousness. Ovid suggests that sexual violence and the exploitation of women are paradigmatic of a corrupt social and political system. In tracing the connections between love and conquest in the *Amores*, Leslie Cahoon argues that "the *libido dominandi* deplored by Sallust (*Catullus* 2.2) becomes in the *Amores* a kind of internal moral rot pervading the lives and loves of individuals." Further, Cahoon points out that "by weaving together the vocabularies of love and war, the *Amores* suggest that the ambition to conquer is in the process of destroying *socialia iura*."⁶ Cahoon's argument that Ovid's use of military imagery in the *Amores* constitutes not merely a witty exercise but a serious critique of Roman *amor* opens up significant inquiry into the implications of an isomorphism between sexual and social relations in Ovid's amatory texts.⁷

My own analysis focuses not so much on the theme of erotic warfare but rather on the ways *amor* reiterates values (and practices) of commercialism and imperialist aggression which turn those who are without real power into commodities of exchange. Thus, I argue that in the *Amores* Ovid presents amatory arrangements as transactions that consolidate masculine authority and privilege and reinforce the integration of male sexual and social dominance. In terms articulated by Teresa de Lauretis and a number of other feminist theorists, Ovid presents us with a "sexual politics" rooted in a sex-gender system where sex is correlated to social values and hierarchies that are necessarily interconnected with political and economic conditions.⁸ My argument will draw on Gayle Rubin's pioneering analysis of how sex-gender systems are part of a "systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products."⁹ Rubin's discussion of Claude Lévi-Strauss's view that kinship systems rely primarily on the exchange of women among men will prove especially useful in examining Ovid's portrayal of amatory relations as well. Ovid's amatory texts show us that the private, domestic sphere of sexuality, the family, and affectivity is not a separate domain of existence but a position within social and political realities in general.¹⁰

Amores 2.11

As we saw in Chapter 4, Ovid's *amator* openly employs deception and exploitation of others to get what he wants. But as I suggested earlier, I do not believe that Ovid is endorsing an approach to love which is based on duplicity and conquest. I think that his purpose is to expose what he considers to be the harsh realities behind the elegiac mask. By so doing, Ovid uncovers the

predatory and violent aspects of *amor*. Although at times the reader may admire the *amator* for his clever manipulative abilities, Ovid makes his readers acutely aware of the immorality of his *amator* by portraying his behavior as unabashedly deceitful and exploitative in the extreme. The shockingly facile way the *amator* accepts and even embraces duplicity and violence as inevitable aspects of love suggests that Ovid wants to provoke a sense of outrage in his audience.

In a number of his elegies, Ovid's *amator* says openly that he prefers deception over honesty and at times even asks to be lied to rather than to hear unpleasant truths. *Amores* 2.11, Ovid's version of the convention of the *propemptikon*, is a case in point. On the surface, the speaker in 2.11 is trying to convince his mistress not to depart on her impending journey. In the interest of dissuading Corinna from her voyage, the speaker warns her about the possible dangers she might encounter. But, rather than pleading with her in a tone of anguish, as Propertius does with Cynthia in his *propemptikon*, the speaker describes at great length, with gusto and vivid detail, why a journey by sea would be extremely perilous. Here the *amator* seems to take pleasure in enumerating the various obstacles standing in the way of his progress with the *puella*.¹¹ Such obstacles make love interesting and challenging to the lover and offer him endless possibilities to strike poses and develop clever maneuvers to overcome whatever stands between him and his beloved.

In his discussion of the poem, Kenneth Quinn argues that the *amator*'s Don Juan persona, with his blasé, flippant attitude, is at odds with the state of mind which is appropriate for an address to a departing mistress.¹² Quinn reads the incongruity as evidence that Ovid is overturning any pretension to seriousness about love because of his speaker's lack of emotional involvement with the amatory situation. But I think Quinn misses part of the point. The speaker's attitude and his romantic posturing in the poem show that he uses Corinna's departure as an opportunity for him to engage in ingenious flights of imagination as he contemplates the adventures she might encounter on her journey. More importantly, that the speaker seems to look forward to the opportunity to hear Corinna's fictions about her journey when she returns suggests that Ovid is quite serious about showing how deception is often both inevitable and necessary to maintain amatory relations.

The poem begins with an overblown, incongruous comparison between the lover's misfortunes and those of epic and tragic heroes:

Prima malas docuit mirantibus aequoris undis
Peliaco pinus vertice caesa vias,
quae concurrentis inter temeraria cautes

conspicuum fuluo vellere vexit ovem.
o utinam, ne quis remo freta longa moveret,
Argo funestas pressa bibisset aquas!

[The trouble began when the pine-tree from Pelion's summit taught evil journeys to wondering waves, the reckless ship making its way among clashing rocks, bore the Golden Fleece. O would that, so no one ever plied the wide sea with an oar, the Argo had had a calamitous leak!] (lines 1–6)

The *exemplum* chosen by the speaker to convey his unhappiness at his mistress' impending departure is as ambiguous as it is hyperbolic. On the surface, the *exemplum* reinforces the speaker's sense of abandonment in its evocation of Jason's tragic abandonment of Medea. The implied correlation between the speaker and Medea, however, suggests that the speaker does not, in fact, imagine himself in a powerless and passive position. It is Medea who engineers the glorious and successful culmination of Jason's heroic journey; in fact it is Medea who ultimately pulls the strings in many of Jason's endeavors. Likewise, it is the *amator* who actively and exuberantly arranges the images of his mistress on both the sea and the shore, in a sense facilitating an imaginary voyage. The uninteresting way the *amator* imagines Corinna at home, staying in bed, reading books, and practicing her lute (*tutius est fouisse torum, legisse libellos, / Threiciam digitis increpuisse lyram*, lines 31 and 32) does little to further his argument that she should stay home, which reinforces the impression it is really her imagined voyage away from him which fuels his creative and erotic imaginations. Indeed, the speaker evokes vivid images of "battling winds," the waters of Scylla and Charybdis, the "deep blue of the harsh sea." These images, although portending danger, also evoke the excitement and thrill of heroic adventure; the sea voyage comes to life, and the speaker himself is aroused by the danger. And although he admonishes Corinna to "let others" tell her of dangers on the sea (*haec alii referant vos*), he clearly relishes narrating in detail the various perils that await her. In fact, the possibility of his mistress embarking on a "dangerous" voyage titillates him; the thrill of amatory pursuit accelerates when the mistress is not merely on the other side of a locked door but is potentially out of the lover's reach forever.

Not only does the *amator* relate in detail the dangers of the sea, he also imagines his mistress feeling remorse as she looks upon the shore and faces inevitable destruction.

Sero respicitur tellus, ubi fune soluto
currit in immensum panda carina salum;
navita sollicitus cum ventos horret iniquos

et prope tam letum, quam prope cernit aquam.
 quod si concussas Triton exasperet undas,
 quam tibi sit toto nullus in ore color!
 tum generosa voces fecundae sidera Leda
 et “felix,” dicas “quem sua terra tenet!”

[Too late the land is seen, when the rope is loosened
 and the curved keel hastens to the boundless sea;
 when the anxious sailor shudders at hostile winds
 and sees death near, as near as he sees the water.
 But if Triton should provoke agitated waves,
 all the color in your face would leave!
 Then you would call the high-born stars, sons of
 fruitful Leda, and say, “Happy is she whom her own land
 holds!”] (lines 23–30)

The vivid imagery in these lines reinforces the sense that the speaker enjoys displaying his own artistry, an opportunity afforded by his mistress’s potential voyage. But there is more. The *amator* pictures his mistress here in a state of enervation, evidenced by the image of her as devoid of all color in her face. Not only does he imagine Corinna debilitated and helpless, he also associates her happiness with containment and confinement. Indeed, the double images of Corinna as pale and as confined by the earth imply a kind of death. Her happiness, as the *amator* imagines it (and perhaps it is he who is *felix* at the prospect), seems to depend on a complete surrender to forces outside herself. As we saw in the previous chapter, Ovid’s *amator* is aroused equally by imagining his mistress as helpless *and* as vigorously unconstrained. Here, the *amator* switches from his portrayal of a feeble and frail Corinna to one who is animated and fearless, recounting to him her adventures on the sea.

Illic adposito narrabis multa Lyaeo —
 paene sit ut mediis obruta navis aquis;
 dumque ad me properas, neque iniquae tempora noctis
 nec te praecipites extimuisse Notos.

[There, when the wine is poured, you will tell me many things—how your ship was nearly sunk in the midst of the waves; and how while you hastened to me, you feared neither hours of unfriendly night nor headlong winds from the south.] (lines 49–52)

Despite the binary portrayals of his mistress in this poem, what seems to excite the *amator* most is his fantasy of the reunion he will have with her.

Once he has carried her onto the shore and they have exchanged passionate kisses and embraces, he joyfully imagines himself being entrapped by her verbal deceptions:

omnia pro veris credam, sint ficta licebit:
 cur ego non votis blandiar ipse meis?
 haec mihi quam primum caelo nitidissimus alto
 Lucifer admisso tempora portet equo.

[I’ll believe everything you say, even if it is fiction: why shouldn’t I myself be deluded by my own desires? May dazzlingly-bright Lucifer with his galloping celestial horse bring these moments to me as soon as possible.] (lines 53–56)

Leslie Cahoon reads the ending of the poem as evidence of the *amator*’s disillusionment once the fantasy of Corinna’s return has reached its climax. She argues that the speaker is forced, at the end, to confront the “insurmountable obstacle of reality.”¹³ But I think that neither the tone of the speaker’s fantasies nor the tone of the ending bears out such a reading. The *amator* does not confront reality at all. He brushes it aside completely and implies, by the way he exuberantly embraces Corinna’s *ficta*, that he prefers deception to truth. Moreover, the final image of the most dazzling star (*Lucifer nitidissimus*) speeding across the sky not only evokes the excitement of the moment of Corinna’s arrival but also suggests the creative spark that the *ficta* of her imagined voyage inspires in him.

Amores 2.19, 3.4, and 3.8

In 2.19, 3.4, and 3.8, Ovid shows further how deception is not only an inevitable part of the *amator*’s “love” but also how deception is, in fact, necessary to sustain it. In all three poems, which deal openly with adultery, the *amator*’s casual indifference to moral concerns becomes much more blatant. The lover’s flaunting lack of consideration for the moral issues involved in adultery tears away the elegiac ideal that is predicated on the illusion of *fides*. Through the lover’s attitudes, Ovid attempts to expose and ridicule the hypocrisy that is inherent in preserving that illusion. One of the ways he does this is by having the *amator* adopt contradictory attitudes toward the practice of husbands “pimping” for their wives. We see that the *amator*’s criteria for judging the husbands’ behavior are based on the pursuit of his own pleasure and not on any moral or legal consideration.

In 2.19, the speaker clarifies for the husband of his mistress that deception is necessary for the speaker to feel love for her: *quo mihi fortunam, quae numquam fallere curet? / nil ego, quod nullo tempore laedat, amo*. [Why would anyone want a beautiful woman who never takes the trouble to deceive him? I couldn't love that which was never hurtful] (lines 6 and 7). Moreover, the speaker associates his capacity for love with being injured in some way (*laedat*). He emphasizes that what both generates and sustains love are mutual dominance and victimization. In addition, the speaker's use of the neuter form (*nil, quod*) for the object of his affections implies that love based on conquest also involves an objectification of the beloved. As he does in many of the elegies, the speaker cites examples from mythology to argue his point:

pinguis amor nimiumque patens in taedia nobis
vertitur et, stomacho dulcis ut esca, nocet.
si numquam Danaen habuisset aenea turris,
non esset Danae de Iove facta parens;
dum servat Iuno mutatam cornibus Io,
facta est quam fuerat gratior illa Iovi.

[Love that is too comfortable and too accessible turns boring, and hurts the stomach like sweet food. If Danae hadn't been held in that bronze turret, would she have borne a child by Jove? When Juno set her watch over Io, who had been transformed into a horned heifer, she made her seem more desirable to Jove.] (lines 25–30)

Although the speaker seems to be advocating mutual deception and domination, the examples he chooses to make his point stress the victimization of the female lovers. In the cases of both Danae and Io, male sexual desire is linked explicitly to female captivity and silence. Even though the speaker encourages his mistress to deceive him and inflict physical pain on him, he can hardly be considered a victim. He is the one in control, attempting to orchestrate the way their affair will be conducted to satisfy his desires. Although the *amator* refers to his mistress as *versuta* (artful), it is he who ingeniously arranges what roles each of them will play to serve *his* desires best.

saepe time simulans, saepe rogata nega;
et sine me ante tuos proiectum in limine postis
longa pruinosa frigora nocte pati.
sic mihi durat amor longosque adolescit in annos;
hoc iuvat; haec animi sunt alimenta mei.

[Often feigning fear, often, when entreated, say no. And allow me to lie at your door and suffer long cold through the frosty night. Thus my love endures (grows hard), and ripens through long years; this gratifies, this is the food of my life.] (lines 20–26)

The *amator* implies not only that his sexual arousal depends on the use of deception but also that imagining himself in the role of suppliant at his mistress's door provokes pleasure rather than pain. The *amator* explicitly links his prostration and suffering with the heightening of his desires and sexual satisfaction. The emphasis on *his amor* and *his animus* implies that the reversible roles he imagines for himself and his mistress exist solely for *his* erotic and creative sustenance rather than hers. Further, the *amator* makes it clear that maintaining amatory relations depends on both deception and on a precarious balance of power: *si qua volet regnare diu, deludat amantem* [Deception is necessary for any woman, if she wants to rule over her lover for a long time] (line 33). Although the speaker is giving advice to his mistress about how she may dominate him through deception, the fact that he is fully aware of the deception and is the one manipulating her for his own pleasure makes her domination of him a sham. There is very little doubt about who dominates whom here.

The speaker is equally manipulative toward the husband of his mistress. He makes no pretense about his true motives for wanting the *maritus* to concern himself with the immorality of allowing his wife to have lovers:

at tu, formosae secure puellae,
incipere iam prima claudere nocte forem;
incipere, quis totiens furtim tua limina pulset,
quaerere, quid latrent nocte silente canes,
quas ferat et referat sollers ancilla tabellas,
cur totiens vacuo secubat ipsa toro:
mordeat ista tuas aliquando cura medullas,
daque locum nostris materiamque dolis.
ille potest vacuo furari litore harenas,
uxorem stulti si quis amare potest.

[And as for you, careless of your lovely girl, why not start locking up at night, and start asking who knocks frequently at your door in secret. Why do the dogs bark in the silent night, and what about those letters the clever maid delivers back and forth, why does your wife sleep alone in an empty bed so often? May worry eat away at you now and then, and you give me the opportunity and a reason for my deceptions. Loving the wife of a foolish man is like stealing sand off the beach.] (lines 37–46)

[*Quid mihi cum facili, quid cum lenone marito? corrumpit vitio gaudia nostra suo.* [What good to me is an easy, pimping husband? His vice spoils my fun] (lines 57 and 58). The speaker openly admits that the only reason he wants the *maritus* to become more vigilant is so that the excitement of his amatory pursuit will be increased, and he will have an opportunity to exercise his skills at deception.

In 3.4, the counterpart to 2.19, the *amator* reverses his position toward the *maritus* completely and admonishes him to loosen his control over his wife so that she may pursue any desires she might have for other men. At first, it seems that the *amator* is encouraging the husband to be more permissive with his wife so that she will be more chaste. The *amator* argues that people naturally rebel against restrictions and desire whatever is forbidden:

ut iam servaris bene corpus, adultera mens est
 nec custodiri, ne velit, ulla potest;
 nec corpus servare potes, licet omnia claudas:
 omnibus occlusis intus adulter erit.
 cui peccare licet, peccat minus: ipsa potestas
 semina nequitiae languidiora facit.
 desine, crede mihi, vitia inritare vetando;
 obsequio vinces aptius illa tuo.
 vidi ego nuper equum contra sua vincla tenacem
 ore reluctanti fulminis ire modo;
 constitit, ut primum concessas sensit habenas
 frenaque in effusa laxa iacere iuba.
 nitimur in vetitam semper cupimusque negata.

[Though you keep a close watch over her body, her mind is adulterous; guarding her won't stop her desire. You won't be able to guard her body, even if you bolt all the doors and lock everything up, there will still be an adulterer. But if you are permissive with her, she'll stray less. She'll become bored, and the freedom will make her desire for affairs subside. Stop, believe me, prohibiting vice only exacerbates; with more indulgence, you'll be more effective. Lately I saw a tight-reined stallion angrily bolt like lightning; as soon as he felt the reins slacken and the bridle loosen on his flowing mane, he stood still. We always insist on what is prohibited, and desire what is forbidden.] (lines 5–17)

The *amator's* credibility here is extremely suspect in light of the fact that in 2.19 he uses the same argument about “forbidden fruit” to persuade the hus-

band to increase his watch so that the amatory pursuit would be more challenging.

A number of Ovidian critics have pointed out how Ovid's narrator in the *Amores* is willing to say whatever he feels is necessary to seduce his mistress and that if one strategy does not work, he, very often abruptly, changes his tone and his tactics accordingly.¹⁴ Critics, however, although marveling at the *amator's* virtuosity, have often failed to question the exploitative and ruthless attitudes that are embedded in the *amator's* clever posturing. In 2.19 the narrator admits unabashedly that imagining his mistress held captive by her husband evokes desire in him. And although the *amator* reverses his position in 3.4 by asking the *maritus* to be more permissive with his wife, the woman is still treated as a commodity of exchange between her lover and her husband—with no agency or autonomy of her own. Thus, the *Amores* reinforce Irigaray's argument that the foundations of Western patriarchal culture are based on the exchange of women between men and that women are used as commodities in the sexual and economic marketplace: “Men make commerce of them (women), but they do not enter into any exchanges *with* them.”¹⁵

In his book *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Lévi-Strauss argues that in traditional cultures it is women who are the most precious objects of exchange among men.¹⁶ These exchanges, Lévi-Strauss maintains, occur between men from one family group to another and thus help to establish relationships beyond the family, relationships that initiate social organization. In discussing these theories of the role of marriage in kinship systems, Gayle Rubin points out that the exchange of women by men in the marital union establishes a relationship between men which is based on reciprocity as well as on a kinship that consolidates a social link between the partners of the exchange, and thereby bestows power as well as social organization.

If it is the women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it. . . . If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. . . . “Exchange of women” is a shorthand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin. In this sense, the exchange of women is a profound perception of a system in which women do not have full rights to themselves.¹⁷

In the *Amores*, however, Ovid does not portray the exchange of women between men in the context of accepted social norms but rather in the context of adulterous practices. In so doing, Ovid is able to highlight the way in which the use of women as a bartering commodity between men may be regarded not as a function of culture and sophistication but as an indication of moral degeneracy in the culture. By portraying such exchanges in the context of the kind of sexual “pandering” that goes on between the *amator* and the *maritus*, Ovid is able to reveal the crassness and commercialism that are inherent in using women as objects of exchange and how those exchanges contribute to the exploitation of women as well as the perpetuation of social values that emphasize perverse forms of commercialism in general. Ovid seems to suggest here that the *amator*’s attempts at pandering are part of a highly cultured system of trade and commerce.¹⁸

In both *Amores* 2.19 and 3.4, Ovid’s *amator* tries to strike deals with the *maritus* of his mistress in order to manipulate how she will be used as an object of the *amator*’s pleasure. Indeed, an important aspect of the transactions between the *amator* and the *maritus* is the way those transactions point up how the subordination of women is a product of the relationships by which sex and gender are organized in Augustan culture. Ovid’s poems demonstrate how the asymmetric division of the sexes is played out through their different roles as exchanger and exchanged and how those roles require control over women’s sexuality. Ovid’s metaphor for woman as a spirited horse needing to be controlled—whether through permissiveness or discipline—emphasizes the extent to which control over women’s sexuality is a necessary element in establishing men’s dominance over women. Women are portrayed not only as merchandise to be exchanged but also as tools in the process of establishing male relationships of mutual interest and solidarity. Although Ovid’s *amator* appears to engage the *maritus* in order to have a relationship with a *puella*,¹⁹ it is clear that it is the males who are both partners and beneficiaries in the process of exchange and that women are merely the vehicles of that exchange.²⁰ Moreover, the disparity between exchanger and exchanged, giver and gift, is reinforced in both poems in the way the sexual arousal of the *amator* is linked to male fantasies of control over a powerless and captive mistress.

In 3.4 the speaker uses the same mythological *exempla* he uses in 2.19 to try to persuade the husband, but for the opposite reason. In 2.19 the narrator uses Io and Danae as *exempla* of how women should be treated. He argues that women are more desirable if they are held in captivity and are rendered incapable of speaking for themselves. In 3.4 the speaker uses the examples of Io and Danae to show how women should not be treated, and he adds the

example of Penelope to suggest that if the husband stops guarding his wife she will be as faithful as Penelope: *Penelope mansit, quamvis custode carebat, / inter tot iuvenes intemerata procos* [Penelope endured, although she lacked a guard, / chaste among so many youthful suitors] (lines 23 and 24). By including Penelope to support his argument, the speaker offers a paradigm for the wife which would be difficult to refuse. The narrator’s willingness to use the same argument and *exempla* for contradictory purposes suggests that his concern for the chastity of free-born wives is a pose to suit his desires of the moment. Although the *amator*’s arguments in 2.19 and 3.4 are contradictory, the mythological examples of Io and Danae in both poems present women as most desirable when they have been dehumanized and exploited by male captors. The image of Penelope, although emphasizing female chastity, also calls attention to the fact that men have rights in determining the fate of women’s sexuality which women themselves do not have.

The falseness of the *amator*’s concern for virtue becomes more blatant when he announces to the husband that it is simply unsophisticated to object to adulterous wives: *rusticus est nimium, quem laedit adultera coniunx* [That man is so provincial, who is hurt by an adulterous wife] (line 37). Here the *amator* explicitly associates being “cultured” with men’s control over women’s sexuality. Cultural sophistication is linked to the willingness to participate in what may be regarded as “primitive” rituals of exchange and reciprocity. Indeed, Gayle Rubin points out that the exchange of women in marriage is by no means confined to primitive societies. Rather, Rubin argues, “these practices seem only to become more pronounced and commercialized in more ‘civilized’ societies.”²¹ Ovid’s amatory poems lend support to Rubin’s view. In Augustan society the exchange of women between men is part of a social structure in which the woman is subject either to the powers of the *pater familias* or to another male guardian, whether it be a husband or other male relative.²² If relations between men—exemplified by fathers and sons—ensures the genealogy of patriarchal power, then the exchange of women between men is central in the production of culture. Ovid takes this paradigm further and shows that the exchange of women goes beyond the “acceptable” social practices of passing women from fathers to sons. Here, Rubin’s view that the exchange of women by men becomes more commercialized in sophisticated cultures is reinforced by the way Ovid shows how amatory rhetoric is itself a form of commerce, an instrument in the processes of exchange which help consolidate male hegemony. Moreover, the primacy of male relationships in Augustan culture, implicit in the *amator*’s transactions with the *maritus* of his mistress, suggest also that homosocial bonds between men can be

seen as the basis of the socio-cultural order. By portraying women as goods in the “trade that organizes patriarchal society,” Ovid reinforces the association of women with material culture. Women are the raw materials of the transactions men conduct with one another to manage sexual desire in the culture and ensure their own privileged status and supremacy over women.

The *amator* takes his argument even further, however, and asserts that Rome was, in fact, founded on adulterous practices:

et notos mores non satis Urbis habet,
in qua Martigenae non sunt sine crimine nati
Romulus Iliades Iliadesque Remus.

[and he (the husband) doesn't recognize the character for which Rome is famous. Romulus and Remus, Ilia's Martian twins, weren't born without guilt.] (lines 38–40)

The implication in these lines is that if the *maritus* wants to be a good Roman, he had better adhere to the *vitia* that produced Rome in the first place. Indeed, one of the central myths in the story of the origins of Rome is the rape of the Sabine women. By having his *amator* encourage husbands to “pimp” for their wives and justify it by alluding to a “heroic” tradition that sanctions brutality toward women, Ovid presents a view of Roman society which includes a pervasive acceptance of deception and exploitation as an inevitable part of amatory relations, including marriage. By constructing an argument in favor of adultery from the perspective of how it will benefit the husband, Ovid reveals how easy it is to rationalize corrupt practices. Further, by having his *amator* link sexual pandering with Roman imperial conquests, Ovid suggests a close alliance between male sexual dominance and the assertion of political control and aggression.

In 3.8 the *amator* appears to reverse his moral indifference to the practice of pimping. Here, the *amator* expresses outrage that his mistress can be seduced by the allure of wealth and status and that, in essence, her affections can be bought:

Et quisquam ingenuas etiam nunc suspicit artes
aut tenerum dotes carmen habere putat?
ingenium quondam fuerat pretiosius auro,
at nunc barbaria est grandis habere nihil.
cum pulchrae dominae nostri placuere libelli,
quo licuit libris, non licet ire mihi;
cum bene laudavit, laudato ianua clausa est:

turpiter huc illuc ingeniosus eo.
ecce recens dives parto per vulnera censu
praefertur nobis sanguine pastus eques.

[Does anyone nowadays admire liberal arts, or think that love poetry rates a dowry? At one time talent was more precious than gold, but now it is very uncivilized to have nothing. When my little books pleased my lovely mistress, it was possible for them to go where I couldn't. Once she has praised them, she shuts the door on the poet: Here and there I go, my talent disgraced. Look, a new-rich soldier whose wealth was acquired through violence and who was fed on slaughter is preferred to me.] (lines 1–10)

The *amator* presents himself as the upholder of ideals of purity in contrast to the crass values of commercialism. In 3.4 he associated being cultured with the cynical acceptance of a mercantilist approach to “love,” but here the *amator* bemoans the degeneration of a culture that values money more than *ingenium*. The panderer we saw in 2.19 and 3.4 is now the *Musarumpurus Phoebique sacerdos* (line 23). When the *amator*'s high-minded moral position does not get him anywhere, however, he seeks ways in which to rationalize compromising his principles to succeed with his mistress:

Iuppiter, admonitus nihil esse potentius auro,
corruptae pretium, virginia ipse fuit.
dum merces aberat, durus pater, ipsa severa,
aerati postes, ferrea turris erat;
sed postquam sapiens in munere venit adulter,
praebuit ipsa sinus et dare iussa dedit.

[Jupiter, realizing that nothing is more powerful than gold, made himself the price offered to a corrupt virgin. While there was no profit, Father was tough, and the girl strict, her door-posts bronze, her tower iron. But after the clever seducer came in gifts, she offered herself and gave what she was commanded to give.] (lines 29–34)

As he does in a number of the elegies, the *amator* uses Jupiter as his model of a successful seducer of women. Violence, deception, and prostitution are all approaches employed by Jupiter which the *amator* emulates and uses as justifications for his own selfish ends. Here, the *exemplum* proves that women can be bought and that all the *sapiens adulter* needs is enough money. Jupiter's example is used to show that if one wants to be *sapiens*, one must be willing to abandon moral principles. In fact, the whole amatory enterprise is portrayed

as corrupt. *Puellae* willingly give up their virtue for profit, and smart seducers will buy their way into the affections of their mistresses. The *amator's* use of an *exemplum* to justify such corrupt practices reveals his moral outrage to be a sham—a device for seducing his *puella* away from a soldier made appealing because of his greater wealth and status. We find out that the *amator* is not upset about pandering for *moral* reasons but rather because he cannot afford the price:

tantum ne nostros avidi liceantur amores
 et (satis est) aliquid pauperis esse sinant.
 at nunc, exaequet tetricas licet illa Sabinas,
 imperat ut captae, qui dare multa potest.
 me prohibet custos, in me timet illa maritum;
 si dederim, tota cedet uterque domo.

[So long as they don't bid up the prices on our lovers, and leave something for the pauper, it's enough. But now, even if my mistress were on a par with the Sabines, he who is able to give many gifts rules her as his captive. The watchman won't let me in, in my case she's afraid of her husband. If I could pay, they'd both leave us the house.] (lines 59–64)

Although the *amator* idealizes Jupiter's amatory practices, he also announces that his standard for judging a woman's "worth" is how she measures up to one of the Sabine women. His ideal woman—too costly for him at the moment—is one who offers the greatest opportunity for him to subjugate her. Earlier in the *Amores*, in 1.3, the *amator* expressed similar sentiments (only veiled in mythological allusion) when he used Jupiter's relationships with Io, Leda, and Europa as examples of ideal amatory unions. The *amator's* implied correlation of an ideal mistress with mythical women in 1.3 becomes blatant admission in many of the elegies in the third book. In 3.8, the *amator* makes it clear at the end that everyone is out for profit. For the right price, the husband, with the *custos* as accomplice, would turn his home into a house of prostitution.

Amores 3.12

In 3.12 the theme of the exploitation of women for profit is heightened when the *amator* admits that he has prostituted his mistress for the sake of his literary fame. He begins by complaining that his own verses are causing him trouble because they have publicized the charms of his *puella* and made other men desire her:

Quis fuit ille dies, quo tristia semper amanti
 omina non albae concinuistis aves?
 quodue putem sidus nostris occurrere fatis,
 quosve deos in me bella movere querar?
 quae modo dicta mea est, quam coepi solus amare,
 cum multis vereor ne sit habenda mihi.

[What day was it when you evil birds sang the eternally sad omens of love? What star of fate has crossed over me? What gods cause trouble for me I lament? She who was recently mine, she whom I started to love alone, I fear I must share her with the multitude.] (lines 1–6)

The *amator's* stance as the helpless victim of an obsession with *one* woman is contradicted by his declaration in other elegies that he desires a multitude of beautiful women. In addition, the sudden change from the idealized perspective of the elegiac lover to an emphasis on the mercantile aspects of love undermines the *amator's* credibility.

The *amator's* position of complaint that Corinna is "on the market" now because of him is undermined by the underlying implication that he has profited from her as his *subject* in his elegies. What is really on the market are the elegies themselves. Like a pimp, he has profited from his "sale" of her to other lovers, not in monetary terms, but in terms of literary fame. The extent to which he is carried away by imagining other men gaining access to his mistress reveals excitement, rather than outrage, at having the ability to make Corinna seem so desirable. The *amator* admits openly that by making his mistress an attractive and therefore highly marketable commodity, he has become a panderer himself:

fallimur, an nostris innotuit illa libellis?
 sic erit: ingenio prostitit illa meo.
 et merito: quid enim formae praeconia feci?
 vendibilis culpa facta puella mea est.
 me lenone placet, duce me perductus amator,
 ianua per nostras est adaptata manus.
 an prosint dubium, nocuerunt carmina certe:
 invidiae nostris illa fuere bonis.

[Am I deceived, or could it be that she has become well-known because of my books? That's it: she was prostituted by my genius. It serves me right: why was I the one who proclaimed her beauty? It is my fault that my girl has gone up for sale. I have been the panderer of her charms, I have led

other lovers to her, and it was I who opened the doors for them. The benefit my poems have brought me is dubious; they've certainly caused me trouble, and made people envy my success.] (lines 7–14)

The *amator's* entire argument is based on a view of the *puella* as a commodity for him to possess or sell to others. Here he imagines an alliance not with a *maritus* but with an audience of men in general. Whereas earlier the woman is presented as the object of a transaction between her lover and her husband, now she is inseparable from the poems offered as gifts to a voyeuristic and lascivious audience of men. The *puella's* identity as a woman, even a subordinated one, has been subsumed entirely by her role as a literary construction in the *amator's* poems.

In 1.3, in the context of manipulating his mistress with promises of *fama*, the *amator* asked her to give herself to him as *materia* for his *carmina*: *te mihi materiem felicem in carmina praebe* (line 19). But in 1.3 the *amator's* identification of the woman as *materia* is veiled by his conventional elegiac rhetoric of subservience toward her.²³ In 3.12 the *amator* is entirely forthright in his presentation of the elegiac mistress as a thing of sale. The elegiac poet is a panderer who uses her as a *vehicle* to display his talents and sell poems, and her marketability is linked closely to the arousal of male sexual desire, both in the *amator* himself and in the fantasies he has of other men sharing her with him. The *amator's* presentation of his mistress as *vendibilis* defines her exclusively in terms of her *function*—a vehicle of exchange between a male poet and an audience of sexually excitable, predatory men. The pimping we saw in the *amator* trying to make deals with the *maritus* of his mistress now becomes pandering on a large scale. The sexuality of the *femina* is entirely “owned” by the men who use her as an object of exchange.

Moreover, the *amator's* complaints about having to share Corinna with other men contradict his insistence in other poems that the presence of rivals or, for that matter, obstacles in general, only increases the thrill of the amatory pursuit and fuels his creative imagination as well. Immediately after denouncing his own talents in 3.12, the *amator* spends half of the poem offering a display of his poetic virtuosity. He enumerates in stunning detail some of the most well-known myths (e.g., Scylla, Tantalus, Niobe, Proteus) that he, along with other poets, has brought to life in verse. If the *amator's* ulterior motive in this poem is to win back the affections of his mistress, then he is very clever. His pose of pretending to be sorry that he made Corinna so famous conceals his more subtle strategy of dazzling both her and his audience with his genius. Like Jupiter showering gold, the *amator* showers his readers with his gilded rhetoric of myth making:

- 21 per nos Scylla patri caros furata capillos
 pube premit rabidos inguinibusque canes;
 nos pedibus pinnae dedimus, nos crinibus angues;
 victor Abantiades alite fertur equo.
 idem per spatium Tityon porreximus ingens
 26 et tria vipereo fecimus ora cani;
 fecimus Enceladon iaculantem mille lacertis,
 ambiguae captos virginis ore viros;
 Aeolios Ithacis inclusimus utribus Euros;
 proditor in medio Tantalus amne sitit;
 31 de Niobe silicem, de virgine fecimus ursam;
 concinit Odrysium Cecropis ales Ityn;
 Iuppiter aut in aves aut se transformat in aurum
 aut secat imposita virgine taurus aquas.
 Protea quid referam Thebanae semina dentes;
 36 qui vomerent flammam ore, fuisse boves,
 flere genis electra tuas, auriga, sorores,
 quaeque rates fuerint, nunc maris esse deas,
 aversumque diem mensis furialibus Atrei,
 duraque percussam saxa secuta lyram?
 41 exit in immensum fecunda licentia vatam
 obligat historica nec sua verba fide.

[It was because of us poets that Scylla ravaged her father's locks, and keeps packs of mad dogs in her groin and womb. We gave wings to feet, put snakes in hair, made Pegasus strong, carried by his wings. We stretched Tityos out over an enormous space, made three heads for the venomous dog; made Enceladus, shooting spears with his thousand arms, made heroes ravished by the voice of the two-formed Sirens. We shut up the winds of Aeolus in a wineskin for Odysseus, because of us treacherous Tantalus thirsts in the middle of the river, we turned Niobe to flint, made a she-bear from a virgin, Procne into a nightingale. We let Jupiter transform himself into a bird or into gold or as a bull cut the sea with a virgin on his back. Why should I call to mind Proteus, the Theban sown teeth of the dragon, the oxen snorting flames from their mouths, Phaethon's sisters weeping amber tears, sea-goddesses conjured from ships, and the sun turned away from the sight of Thyestes' frenzied feast, and harsh rocks inspired by the sound of the lyre. Poetic license is boundless, and isn't constrained by historical accuracy.]

All of the *amator's* mythological *exempla* bear witness to the poet's abilities to make illusion seem like reality. The *amator's* long list of myths is a devious

way of praising the poet's talents. The *amator* demonstrates how easy it is to be seduced by the poet's myth making, by his powers of language which make mythological figures seem real. But underlying the *amator's* inventory of the poet's accomplishments is an elaborate deception of both his mistress and his audience. He wears the mask of the abandoned lover and pretends to prefer reality to fiction, but we have seen the way he celebrates at great length the fictional world of myth created by the poet. Like his myths, Corinna is also a fiction created by the poet, and the implication is that if she continues to be a fiction — that is, *materia* for the poet to use for his art — she will gain mythical status. The *amator's* strategy is ingenious, both as a means of winning back his mistress and as a way of showing off his skills as a poet. The *amator's* assertion that the "gullibility" (*credulitas*) of his audience has been harmful to him is hardly believable, considering his own argument that his genius has produced such compelling and seductive images of his *femina*.

At line 41, the *amator* refers to the poet's skills as *fecunda licentia*, a description that, on one level, may be interpreted as *poetic license*. Poetic license by itself is a gender-neutral activity that normally refers to the poet's authority to manipulate language freely and creatively. But here the basic meaning of *fecunda* as *fertile* resonates with the *amator's* earlier allusions to his mistress as fertile *materia* for his poetic productions. Furthermore, the sexual overtones of *licentia* suggest a link between the poetic license of the elegiac poet and the wanton use of the *materia* for his art. In other words, the poet exploits the fertile subject of woman to produce his *carmina* as his offspring. Far from being his undoing, the success of the *amator's* pandering has proven what a fruitful enterprise literary prostitution can be. Showing how good a salesman the *amator* is, Ovid suggests that the elegiac stance of servitude toward the mistress is self-serving for the *amator* and dehumanizing toward women. Moreover, by having his *amator* openly identify the elegiac mistress as *materia*, Ovid points to an objectification and exploitation of the female which are inherent not only in the elegiac enterprise but in the nature of amatory relations in general.

Roman poets before Ovid showed the connection between sexual and political conquest, and they criticized the values of commercialism which were so prominent in Roman society. Both Catullus and Propertius dramatize the conflict between the private world of the lover and the *vita activa* of the statesman and the soldier. But for both poets, the erotic and imaginative life offers, at least potentially, a moral refuge from the degradation in the exterior world. Ovid, on the other hand, shows that rather than provide a moral alternative, *amor* often reiterates the mercantilist and imperialist values in Roman

society. His elegies expose the competitive and violent nature of love and show how erotic warfare is as potentially threatening to the social order, to the perpetuation of cultural ideals, as actual warfare. By exhibiting how dehumanizing the male lover's conquest of his beloved is, Ovid permits us to see the destructiveness and inhumanity in the desire to conquer and enslave others.

Further, Ovid's portrayal of the poet in the *Amores* seems, on the surface, to disavow the idealism traditionally associated with poets of love. But Ovid's demystification of the elegiac poet's avowed commitment to moral ideals questions and destabilizes ideologies of erotic conquest and domination. In refusing to perpetuate the illusions and self-deceptions that he believed were so much a part of love and love poetry, Ovid's poems reflect a deep commitment to the moral responsibility of the poet to show the cruelty and inhumanity perpetrated in the name of culture, in the name of *amor*.